

Atonement as the Foundation of Peace - Part I

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Date: 11 August 2024

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[0:00] Good evening, good morning, good day, good, you know, who knows. Hello. My name's Anthony. I get to serve as one of the pastors here at the Table Church. It's good to be with you.

And we are in the middle of a series on the book of Romans, Romans reclaimed as a gospel of peace. And Romans has been this book, it's one of the largest letters of Paul, the largest letter of Paul in the New Testament.

And it's been used in all sorts of interesting ways throughout the centuries. And there's this interesting thing that happens that over the years when everybody gets a hold of the book of Romans and truly understands it, revival or reformation or something new and interesting in the kingdom of God tends to happen.

And that same book can be used to control and oppress and hurt and harm and do a lot of painful things.

And so we've been looking at this book as a way of reclaiming it, that the Romans is about a gospel that proclaims shalom, wholeness, peace for the whole of creation. So that's what we're looking at.

[1:12] But before we do that, as I like to do sometimes for a sermon, we're going to go look at a BuzzFeed list of inventions that no one asked for. So, number one, here it is, here is the selfie toaster.

If you need to look at yourself but you don't have a mirror for breakfast, you can invest in a selfie toaster, which will slide it in and, you know, get a little picture of your face.

If you have some, like, sort of auto-cannibalism tendencies, this is for you. Next, next. Next. Breathable alcohol bars. If you know, you're like, ah, I don't really like the taste of alcohol, but I love the feeling of getting smashed.

You can go to a breathable alcohol bar, which sort of aerosolizes the alcohol, and you can just go in and breathe it in. Seems fun. Next. Next. This is the robot bridesmaids for people who manage to find a life partner but have no friends.

You can get a robot bridesmaid to serve in that role. If you are considering this, just call me instead. I will put on a bridesmaid's dress. It's fine. Next one is the mustache protector.

[2:19] If you are one of those people who are gifted with facial hair and you need a way to keep the spaghetti sauce off of your mustache protector, you can put this thing on. Yeah, yeah.

I mean, maybe somebody asked for this, but then is it at what cost? At what cost? Next one, last one is the selfie spoon. If you are still posting pictures of the food that you eat on Instagram, like it's 2007, you can just get a camera attached to your spoon, and that way you can, you know, take pictures of your cinnamon toast crutch while you eat.

Now, the thing that all of these inventions have in common is that they are solving problems that no one was asking to be solved. Right? And that's why we don't have these in our houses.

They are not big hits. They are not ending up on Shark Tank and getting funded. They are solving problems that no one was asking to be solved. And that, right there, solving problems that no one was asking to be solved, is the main problem with how many of us were taught to read the Bible.

It gets read and interpreted in a way to answer questions that no one's really asking. Or at least, the original authors and the original audience weren't asking.

[3 : 32] So we force the Bible, and specifically a book like Romans, to answer questions like how people get saved from the wrath of God. Or to answer questions about the theological mechanisms of salvation, sometimes called atonement theories, to get that salvation from God.

Answers questions around how Jesus becomes your personal Savior. Forced to answer questions about how to admit your sin, your personal, individual sin.

Believe that Jesus died for you, just you, and commit your life to him. And that's what Romans is forced to become a description of, or an answer to, even though at the time nobody was actually asking these questions.

And this is what I call the sort of paganization of the Bible. So I know that there are sort of modern pagan movements that have more to do with, like creation and ecology. I'm not talking about that.

I'm talking about sort of this pagan mindset that assumes the gods are angry. And in order for us to have sort of success on planet Earth, we have to get the gods off of our back.

[4 : 37] And so we need to light sacrifices to get the gods on our side. And there's this bastardization of Christianity that can happen that turns Christianity into one of the old pagan religions.

God is upset at us, but Jesus will stand in the way of God's anger, and then we can go about our lives. And that message gets confused with the gospel. But those questions, how to get saved from the wrath of God and theological mechanisms of salvation, weren't the primary questions that first century people were asking.

99% of the Roman Empire was living at the subsistence level, beholden to the 1% who held the land and the property and the wealth and the power and the senate positions.

And those 99%, yes, maybe they had some interest in religion, but their questions, their fundamental, most important questions were much more practical.

Will I have enough to eat? Will the authorities harass me? Is violence going to be done to me, or am I going to be conscripted and forced to commit violence on behalf of the empire?

[5 : 51] Is my family going to be broken up by the government because they're going to take my children and send them to some faraway land to commit violence on their behalf? Are the rich going to steal from me?

Is ecological disaster going to kill us all? And are the gods, there's a typo here, are the gods going to help us or hurt us? Those are first century questions.

Not about being saved from the wrath of God and mechanisms of salvation and atonement theories, but much more practical. Now, 21st century questions aren't all that different.

Will I have enough to eat? Am I going to get pulled over by the police? Am I going to get assaulted or hurt? Am I going to be forced to commit violence?

Are my tax dollars going to do violence on my behalf? Is my family going to be deported or sent away? Is the 1% going to figure out new and inventive ways to make themselves even richer and steal from me?

[6 : 50] Is ecological disaster going to take us all down? And is God on our side? Is there a God at all? Does that God care? Most modern folks, particularly if you were not raised in a sort of typical version of Christianity, aren't daily asking questions about how to appease an angry God.

You take a poll, one of those like presidential polls of what's important to you in this presidential election. The top questions that come up aren't, how do we get God on our side or how do we get God off our back?

It's, do I have enough to eat? Many approaches to the book of Romans are trying to fix this problem, in quotation marks, problem of individual sin.

How am I going to deal with my individual sin? Get God off my back. That's the approach to the book of Romans. And as Pastor Tinetta talked about a couple weeks ago, she reminded us of this evangelical tool called the Romans Road.

It's got the problem summed up in Romans chapter 3, verse 23. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The peril for the wages of sin is death.

[8 : 03] The provision for God demonstrates his own love for us, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And the response, if you confess with your mouth, you will be saved. And that sounds kind of nice, and it sounds kind of biblical, but it's taking verses out of context and forcing the letter to answer questions it's not interested in.

It's what philosopher and discipleship expert Dallas Willard called the gospel of sin management. A gospel of sin management presumes a Christ with no serious work other than redeeming humankind.

A gospel of sin management Christian, it fosters vampire Christians who only want a little blood for their sins, but nothing more to do with Jesus until heaven. And this creates a failure of discipleship.

Because if the problem, the only problem that you're trying to solve is a sin management problem, to get God off my back, then you've got a religious movement that can simultaneously be the most likely to have profound salvation experiences, and also care very little about their neighbor and creation itself.

Because the problem's been solved. My individual sin is taken care of by Jesus on the cross. It's happened. And because of that, I don't really need to worry about things until I get to heaven.

[9 : 20] And then there's this discipleship failure. I have enough of Jesus' blood to cover me, and I don't need to worry about anything else. Or it can become a tool to control and exert control on others.

I can use that gospel of sin management to project onto folks, hey, your problem, I'm making it my problem, and I need to fix your problem in order to make me feel better.

And so the Romans road is solving a problem that the letter, the book of Romans, is not interested in solving. There has long been a tradition of teaching a plan of salvation, unattached to any story or any narrative.

But the Bible does not give us a plan. It gives us a story. And stories are a lot messier. They're a lot less sort of A, B, C, therefore D, a lot less sort of logical and philosophical.

But when you read the Bible as story, as narrative, and not just plan, it actually makes the Bible make a lot more sense because we're coming at it at a way that it's intended to be come at rather than trying to force and squeeze it into something it never was meant to be.

[10 : 35] Gospel is a word that does not mean good advice. It means good news. That something has happened. Something worth proclaiming.

Something worth talking about. The gospel, the good news, is not so much a story of what you need to do now, but rather a story of this is what has already happened.

Now, while there are the similarities between the questions that modern people and ancient people are trying to solve, there are differences in the way that ancient people and modern people sort of conceptualized the world.

What we would call a master story. The story that makes sense of all other stories. And this is sort of the ancient first century way of framing the master story.

They would say, an ancient person would say, well, it appears that the world is run merely by individuals in power. In fact, there are these invisible powers of death, empire, and oppression that operate the economies, governments, and the sword, which would be the police and military.

[11 : 40] So an ancient person would sort of conceptualize the world as, yes, you have emperors and armies and governors and kings and armies and all of that. But in reality, there are these invisible realities, the powers, the principalities, that are really controlling the world.

We can't see them, but we know they're there. That's sort of the master meta-narrative, the meta-story that makes sense of the ancient world for an ancient person. A modern person would say this a little differently.

They would say this, well, it appears the world is run merely by individuals in power. In fact, there are systems of racism and patriarchy and colonialism that operate the economies and governments and the sword.

So in reality, not all that different. An ancient person, they're willing to sort of create these characters, these powers, these principalities, what you might call angels and demons and gods and goddesses. They're sort of running things.

And the modern person, well, they're not quite that superstitious. But in reality, we still have language that gets at systems, systems of oppression. And by the way, this isn't just like a progressive thing.

[12 : 48] Conservative folks do this as well. Conservative folks also talk about, you know, the Hollywood agenda. That's just a way of talking about systems, right? Oh, the gay agenda that's infecting our country.

That's just a way of talking about the systems that they believe are running the world. The Illuminati, the deep state, all those sorts of things, okay? Now, in biblical modern, in biblical ancient language, sin and death are not just spiritual esoteric terms.

They're characters in a story. Those characters have agency and they take action in the world. And therefore, Romans is not about how to deal with your personal sin.

The book of Romans and the book of the, the stories of the New Testament are the stories of how these mega superpowers and systems or characters, such as sin with a capital S and death with a capital D are defeated and dealt with.

And therefore, all of creation is restored. Now, that's not to say that individual mistakes, trespasses, transgressions, sins don't matter. They do. But in the imagination of the Bible, they aren't the only or even the primary things that matter.

[14 : 06] If we're to use racism as an example, you could get every single person, every single white person to be nice and treat fairly every single BIPOC person. But that doesn't undo the racism built into every system and the laws and the books that keep BIPOC books out of certain neighborhoods or push their communities into poverty or make it harder to get out.

Niceness does not undo generations of harm and mere morality is not the key to creating a new kind of society. This is how Walter Wink explains this in his book, Engaging the Powers.

He writes this. He says, the owner of a business, for example, may undergo an experience of spiritual rebirth and genuinely desire to humanize the conditions under which her employees work. But she encounters immediately a fixed constraint, cost.

She cannot raise salaries sharply and still remain competitive when a factory owner in Taiwan or South Korea is making the same product with teenage girl laborers paid one-tenth of the salary and working 12 or 14 hours a day at six days a week.

The system is greedy on her behalf. And if she rejects the system's values, she may be ejected by the system. It's not just that people are making choices about how they will behave in the economic system.

[15 : 21] The system is also making choices about who will remain viable. We do not contend against flesh and blood, but against the world rulers of this present darkness.

Systems are racist and sexist and ableist on my behalf. And that doesn't get me off the hook for whether or not I wake up and decide to be a jackass or not.

But the system is also being a jackass on my behalf. So what we're going to do this morning is we're going to take a look at two chapters of Romans. We're going to take a look at Romans 5 to see the story that Paul is telling in order to answer these questions and deal with the world as Paul understands it and that his fellow Jews and Greeks and Romans would have understood it.

And then we're going to flip forward to how that sort of plays out in Romans 13, which is that whole messy submit to government chapter. So we're going to be in Romans chapter 5 starting in verse 12 to begin with.

I'm going to offer some commentary as we go out, as we go through. So Romans 5 verse 12, therefore, just as sin, this is sin with a capital S, this is sin, the character, not just the bad stuff you do, but a power, an entity, a force that's in the world.

[16 : 38] Sin came into the world through one man, namely Adam, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned. Death reigned from Adam to Moses.

So sin and death are these cosmic characters that enter into the world, into creation, through Adam. Now, is Paul imagining a historical Adam or a mythical Adam?

It's actually a really great question and one that's really tricky to get at because the ancient people would tell these stories and we also know that ancient people weren't stupid, okay?

Sometimes we like to imagine the ancient folks, they were just sort of mythicist, they had magical thinking, they were just really ignorant. Well, there seems to be some good evidence that they knew that the myths that they were telling were myths, but they also knew those myths had explanatory power.

So Paul is using the story of Adam to make a larger point. There is this Adam, Adam makes a mistake, the first human, and so the characters of sin and death enter into the world and notice that what death is reigning, back up a slide, death isn't just in the world, death is reigning.

[17 : 47] Death is taking the position of God as ruler, taking the position of humans as ruler. Genesis 1 theology says that God creates humanity and gives them the position of co-regents, co-rulers over creation.

And with Adam's mistake, death, sin come in and they co-opt that reigning, that kingship rule. But, Paul continues, verse 15, the free gift is not like the trespass.

For if the many, again, I capitalize the many here, the many serve as sort of a code word for Paul for humanity, for everyone. If the many died through Adam's trespass, Adam's mistake, humanity's mistake, much more surely have the grace of God and the gift and the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many.

So Paul is making a sort of a logical or rhetorical argument. If the mistake that Adam, humanity made, brought in death, how much more then does the grace, the gift of Jesus, Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, how much more then does Jesus' actions set us free, give us grace?

If it happened to the many, aka everybody in humanity, how much more then does the gift of the grace, the life, the death, the actions of Jesus abound to the many, everybody in humanity, all people.

[19 : 24] Verse 16, And the gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the gift following many trespasses brings justification.

So again, making the same argument, the gift of Jesus is not like the effect of Adam's mistake. The judgment brought condemnation, but the gift brings justification.

verse 17, If because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus.

So Paul is drawing these comparisons between the first Adam and the second Adam, Jesus. Between this mythical person, Adam, who represents all of humanity, and this historical person, Jesus, who represents all of humanity.

And if the one Adam made a mistake on behalf of everyone, then how much more does the gift of Jesus apply to everyone?

[20 : 28] And again, notice the contrast. Death reigns through the one. Much more surely will grace reign through Jesus. And it's not just grace that reigns.

Much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace reign. This is an underappreciated theme in the New Testament. That those who rule and reign in God's kingdom are us.

Which isn't heresy. It's that Genesis 1 theology that God creates humans to rule and reign and to be co-regents alongside God. As we've talked about in this church before, in the book of Revelation, one of the big culmination scenes is Jesus inviting his people up onto the throne.

So verse 18, therefore just as one man's trespass, Adam's trespass, humanity's trespass led to condemnation for all. Next slide, verse 18.

So one man's act, Jesus' act of righteousness leads to justification in life for how many people, everybody? All. There was this famous theologian in the early 20th century, Karl Barth, and he was asked, when were you saved?

[21 : 45] And Barth responded, 2,000 years ago in Calvary. And there can be this focus in many sort of streams of Christianity that focuses on your individual moment of salvation.

And don't get me wrong, I've had some powerful sort of existentially important moments where I gave my life to Jesus, where I experienced baptism by the Holy Spirit.

And I don't necessarily deny the reality or the importance of those moments. But I also know that the sort of story that gets told in the modern era about those moments is about you and your decision.

Have you made a decision? Whereas the story that Romans is telling is not about you and your decision, it's saying, this is what has happened. Just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so Jesus' act of righteousness leads to justification in life for all.

When were you saved? I was saved 2,000 years ago on Calvary. My salvation was not about me and my decision, it was about what God has already decided. That was the moment.

[22 : 50] Verse 19, next slide. For just as through the one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners, through the one man's obedience, the many will be made righteous. This promise is for everyone, sin and death.

Those powers, those principalities, those characters have been defeated. Now, I put this in a chart because I'm a nerd and I want to make it easy. If it seems like Paul is being repetitive, it's because he is.

He's trying to make the same point over and over and over again. Verse 15, the result of Adam is that the many died. The result of Jesus is that God's grace and gift overflowed to the many. Verse 16, the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation.

The result of Jesus, the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. 17, death reigned through one man. The result of Jesus, life reigns through one man. 18, one trespass brought condemnation for all.

The result of Jesus is that one act of righteousness brings justification in life for all. Verse 19, through the disobedience of one man, the many were made sinners. The result of Jesus, through the reobedience of one man, the many will be made righteous.

[23 : 53] Paul is trying to make it as abundantly clear as he can. If you think what Adam did was so bad, then I've got good news. What Jesus did was infinitely better.

And if you think what Adam did applies to every human, then I've got good news. What Jesus offers applies to every human.

Now some will read this and be like, well you have to pray the sinner's prayer though, right? Of course. Hmm. I don't see that in there. It's like Romans wrote theology.

If you, you know, everyone has sinned and you have to confess and believe with your mouth and then you will be saved. Like that sort of narrative, that sort of theology, that sort of story means that Jesus was an utter failure as an evangelist.

Because Jesus did not go around preaching, everyone's a sinner but if you confess that I am Lord then you will be saved. Jesus never says those words. Jesus' message is the poor and the spirit.

[24 : 58] They're blessed. The meek, they inherit the earth. The kingdom of God has arrived. It's here. It's showing up. It's already, oh you want some food? I'm going to give you some food. Do you need some healing? I'm going to give you some healing. There's no like bar that you have to pass to get over and like well say this prayer or make this decision.

Jesus' grace, God's grace abounds to all, the many, to everyone. So how does this work practically if in Paul's mind, Paul's theology, sin and death have been defeated, they are no longer active characters in the story or if they are, they are in their death throes, those final last minutes of a game where the losing side just starts playing dirty but they are utterly defeated and there's nothing they can do.

If sin and death have been defeated, then how does this work out practically in our lives and how does this answer the questions of what do I eat and is the police going to come and get me?

Now Becky began to work this out last week with her sermon on Romans 12 and she preached about this idea of our bodies as a living sacrifice and loving one another with mutual affection and outdoing one another and showing honor and that we're all members of the same body and that we need to have an ethic of love which is then followed up with this troublesome little passage called Romans 13 that goes like this, let every person be subject to the governing authorities for there's no authority except from God and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed and those who resist will incur judgment for rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad for do you wish to have no fear of the authority then do what is good and you will receive its approval for it is God's agent for your good but if you do what is wrong you should be afraid for the authority does not bear the sword in vain is the agent of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer and you read this and you're like

Paul what the heck and if you've been around you know that this passage has been used to manipulate and to do harm particularly to talk a little politics when Republicans in power Republicans will bring up this verse obey every authority and then when Democrats are in power the Republicans sort of forget Romans 13 exists right but it's been used as hey if the police pull you over why don't you just listen hey if this law is on the books why don't you just obey that law Romans 13 you better believe has been used against every civil rights lawyer against every protester against genocide it's been used in many many cases as a way to justify hey if the government is doing it you need to obey you need to listen that's what God said is right Paul says it now if you hear an author like Paul who I believe is pretty brilliant seem to blatantly contradict himself it's important to remember that likely something else is going on because remember this chapter

[28 : 00] Romans 13 is written by a person who is routinely imprisoned beaten up by the city or state authorities and eventually beheaded because of his challenge to the government so something else is going on here when you hear Romans 13 being read as an excuse to reinforce what we know to be harm and oppression you have to know it's being used poorly because the logic of Romans is the powers have been defeated any system set up to divide people needs to be demolished the primary ethic by which we should live is one of loving your neighbor as yourself therefore what so I want to introduce you to this wonderful what they call an anti-commentary on the book of Romans called Romans Disarmed by two biblical scholars Sylvia Kismat and Brian Walsh they have a book on Colossians they have a book on Romans they are brilliant and they are wonderful and in their sort of anti-commentaries they include what they call targums targums is an Aramaic word and it basically means instruction or interpretation so in the first century maybe a little before maybe a little after the Jews begin to lose their language of Hebrew and they begin to speak Aramaic because of the exile and deportation and all of that the Jews are removed forcibly removed from Judea they are forced into Babylon they are forced to lose Aramaic so they have to start translating their Bibles the Tanakh the Torah the prophets the writings out of Hebrew into Aramaic and as they do so they begin to blend and weave together both strict interpretation translation with commentary or a word you might hear as midrash sort of these metaphorical allegorical imaginative ways of taking the text of scripture and bringing it into their real lives that's a targum and so part of what

Kiesma and Walsh do in their commentaries is they begin to write targums of New Testament scripture this translation and commentary mixed into one and so the way I want to conclude my sermon is I just want to read to you their targum of Romans 13 which I was talking to John earlier Jonathan earlier about like it's a little bit of cheating of just like reading somebody else's book for a sermon and also they say it better than I ever could and so I think it's worth hearing and giving some public reading too so this is how they end Romans chapter 12 they say evil never overcomes evil violence never ever ends violence and when you ingest the poison of violence even in a just cause it corrupts deforms and perverts you so dear friends in these violent times in the face of enemies who seek to overwhelm you remember this do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good you see goodness is stronger than evil love is stronger than hate light is stronger than darkness truth is stronger than lies peace is stronger than war reconciliation surpasses revenge and generous hospitality disarms enmity and it turns to Romans 13 now they're writing as if they were

Paul I know what you're thinking I can already hear the question what about the state I can already hear the objection aren't we called to be law abiding people I know too well how you have interpreted my words on this matter I know that somehow I Paul have been interpreted to say that all Christians should obey the ruling authorities regardless of how violent unjust and cruel those authorities might be really do you think that I could call for such a radically alternative body politic as I have just done and then in the very next breath somehow call for blind obedience to the regime of the empire how could I call for total obedience to Lord Jesus and also require such obedience to Lord Caesar or any other regime how could I call for blessing our enemies at one minute and then require obedience to the war machine of the state in the next or perhaps I should put this question to you how could you have ever read what I said in Romans 13 apart what I have just written in Romans 12 and indeed the whole letter how could you ever interpret my words as legitimizing the rule of the empire when it was the empire that persecuted our people and put our

Lord on a cross and how could you have ever read my words about the state apart from how deeply rooted I am in both the Torah and the prophets haven't I been quoting these texts throughout my letter to you so listen up yes if we are to be the alternative body politic that I'm talking about then we have to seriously consider our relationship with the ruling authorities and here's my word to you listen closely the state has no self-appointed divine authority saying God bless America is presumptuous and America first is blasphemy all authority is rooted in the God of Messiah Jesus the very God that the empire rejects in its embrace of idolatry while the state might appear to be in control all the power that it seems to have is only temporary ironically the state's power is granted by the very God its actions betray the God it really serves have no power no authority and no ability to bring life submitting all government rule to the sovereignty of God we demote arrogant and totalitarian rulers but knowing that these are violent regimes we urge caution watch your back around the state while we grant no ultimate authority to the state because God is the final authority we are wise to be careful around the state the state does after all bear the sword it may present itself as a benevolent force of law and order but the taser guns come out pretty quick along with the stun grenades and tear gas and lethal force especially if you're black or latino or undocumented or indigenous so if you get on the wrong side of the regime fear is a healthy response and I know this seems to be contrary to the subversive ethic that I've been talking about if we're called to be living sacrifices then why not take that as far as it will go and let ourselves be sacrificed before the violent state

I'm suggesting you choose your battles for some of us protest resistance and defiance are not only possible but necessary but others should have a healthy fear for those to whom fear is owed so be careful with the authorities don't mess around with homeland security folks if you can help it don't cheaply bring the attention of the FBI or ICE to your community this is no game don't expose your vulnerable neighbors unnecessarily some folks really need to be feared don't allow such fear to be the last word or on the way you comport yourself in this world and even though I have insisted that we are to walk with the oppressed and that we are to turn all notions of honor and prestige on their head by bestowing honor in those deemed shameful by the regime give honor to those you think that are on top of the heap you need to notice the quotation marks notice the irony notice the nudge nudge wink wink those at the top might in fact be undeserving and yet we honor them anyway outdoing one another and showing honor means honoring the underserving both in society's eyes and in our own but even this is not the last word while I've urged you to show respect to those who are due such respect and even to show honor to those who think they are owed such honor remember this oh no one anything except to love one another for the love one loves for the one who loves the other has fulfilled the law not only do we need to relativize all authority subjecting it to the God of Jesus the Messiah so also do we need to relativize all law all judicial rulings all constitutions all executive orders by subjecting all law to the law of love there is another law that is above all law there is another law that passes judgment on all law regardless of which imperial seal that law bears according to this law the only thing that we most profoundly owe to one another is love and to make sure that no one misses the reference let me locate this law of love in the radical tradition of Torah the commandments say you shall not commit adultery you shall not murder you shall not steal you shall not covet and all the other commandments all other laws that would be worthy of obedience are summed up in this word love your neighbor as yourself love does no wrong to a neighbor therefore love is the fulfilling of the law and this is how the gospel of

[37 : 11] Jesus undermines the very foundations of all worldly systems of law all laws are judged by this law of love if love is fulfilling of the law then any laws that call us anything short of love any laws that make us obligated to some at the expense of others any laws that would legitimate the oppression of others any judged by the law of love as null and void the law of love not only judges all other law it calls us to civil disobedience against laws that contravene the law of love maybe that means setting up a blockade against a pipeline or protesting a travel ban on Muslims or demanding that children not be taken from their parents at the border if you need it to be any more specific then look again at those injunctions against adultery and murder and stealing and coveting while I may have had in mind the imperial regime of Nero when I wrote those first words Nero's insatiable sexual appetite his household of blood and murder his economy of theft and village his empire of insatiable greed and expansion things really haven't changed that much have they yes you have a system of law but it doesn't seem to protect women from misogynistic violence it doesn't stop indigenous land from being stolen it doesn't inhibit state sanctioned murder it doesn't stop the vulnerable from being deported it provides legal sanction from the theft of public resources for private gain it serves to protect covetousness and greed as virtues not crimes in short it's a law that results in death not life but what else would you expect

I mean you know what time it is don't you you know that the times they are a changing you know that the night is far gone the day is near you know that time is up for this imperial house of cards you know that while we have heard all the bravado of a new age a new day of renewed strength renewed greatness that the truth is somehow something very different you know that this too is an age of darkness an age stuck in the night but you also know that this age is coming to an end it is darkest just before the dawn and the dawn is coming and that's what this whole story of Jesus has been all about that's what time it really is it's time for the creatures of the dark and disarray to fall before the morning light it is time for this endless night to give way to dawn what time is it it is time to wake up from our culturally imposed slumber wake up to what God is up to transforming our world wake up to live in the full light of the coming kingdom what time is it it is time to put aside the works of darkness but if you're going to do that my friends then you're going to need the armor of light you'll need to clothe yourselves in this light because the forces of darkness will try to hold you down with a strong arm up their sleeve what time is it it is time to put on the Lord Jesus Christ that is what it means to wear the armor of light it is time to be dressed in Christ to be transformed as the body of Christ to be precisely the kind of subversive body politic that we've been talking about my friends the night is far gone the day is near so live in the day time is up for the oppressive laws of the states who obey the wall of love time is up for the empire so live in the kingdom time is already up for the newly inaugurated regime so put on the Lord Jesus Christ the night is gone the day is near

I know dear friends I know it doesn't feel like that most of the time I know that for many of us it feels like the night is endless and there is no day in sight no slight glimmer of dawn on the horizon not even the morning star is visible to you I know that even the morning star can be hidden in the clouds of despair and sadness but if you can see just beyond the range of normal sight if you can see with the eyes of faith if your imagination has been set free if your minds have been renewed if you can discern discern the times you will see against the grain of the times against the imperial evidence amassed against you you will see that the night is indeed far gone and the day is near so living in faith and embracing the politics of love but a say to the darkness we beg to differ and live as in the day amen thank you